Design Dialogue Workshops

Towards a relational model of care
in the OOHC system

Summary of Workshop 1 outcomes

January 2024

Centre for
Relational Care

Purpose of Design Dialogue Workshop 1

Start the work to design an alternative to OOHC that puts relationships at the heart of the system.

Workshop 1 recap

Sharing different perspectives about the challenges of changing the OOHC system

➡ Unearth the different views on where change is needed, and what is possible

➡ Discuss the way the system sees risk

➡ Acknowledge and grapple with the inherent tensions in system change

➡ Understand the differences and similarities of opinion so we can arrive at a shared purpose

➡ Develop better solutions by understanding the constraints and context of the system

Workshop 1 recap

Unpacking what we mean by a OOHC system that prioritises relationships?

→ Get to a more specific understanding of what we mean when we talk about changing towards a more relational system. What are we actually talking about here?

→ Understand what has traditionally stopped the system delivering in this way. Why is the system incentivised towards the type of response it currently takes?

Workshop 1 recap

Look at where the change needs to take place

➡️ Begin to identify the key areas of action, or levers for change where we might start.
(We don't need to agree on these at this stage)

➡️ Get more specific about the things we suspect are making it hard to build meaningful relationships with children. Where the system is currently not meeting the mark, and the areas we think need to change.

Workshop 1 recap

Come up with initial ideas about <u>how</u> we might make this change, and where best to start

→ Make some first thoughts and ideas about what potential solutions in this area could be

→ Use these potential solutions as a way to uncover assumptions, potential blockers and other useful data

→ Use these potential solutions as a way of making tangible some of the less concrete values we have been discussing

Workshop 1 dialogue outcomes

Declarations of Change

→ We need a system where **the child is the north star**

→ We need a system that **supports meaningful connection and relationships**, because they are a fundamental human need, change lives and create safety

→ We need a system that is **flexible enough to support the diverse needs of families and children**

→ We need a system that **empowers, celebrates and rewards good carers** and encourages carer recruitment

→ We need a **cultural movement that builds empathy, action, and creates political pressure for change**

Why Change is Needed

→ **The cost of OOHC is high, and it's not meeting the needs of children, families or carers**
Urgent action is required to resolve the budget issues hindering the allocation of resources to high-cost emergency placements. Collaboration with government, NGOs, independent organisations, and service providers is crucial.

→ **The system is resistant to change due to fear of liability, political standing and lack of visible alternatives**
The system is built around institutional imperatives which aim to reduce their liability. There is perceived risk in change because if something goes wrong, they may be liable. Professionals and politicians are historically hesitant to make significant changes, fearing potential negative outcomes, media scrutiny, and political backlash.

→ **We're measuring the wrong stuff in the wrong way**
The focus of regulation, compliance, accreditation and formal guidelines are designed around risk mitigation to reduce liability, not understand the holistic wellbeing of kids in care. We need new ways of assessing the efficacy of services.

Workshop 1 dialogue outcomes

Why Change is Needed

→ **All kids need connection, services are not providing that and therefore are causing harm**
Relational deprivation is harmful to children. Services provided to solve a problem can create more problems. Risk mitigation strategies identified to follow rules are sometimes in direct competition with what's best for the child.

→ **Individuals within the system want what is best for children, but they are disempowered**
There's a disconnect between stated values and obligations and actual practices in the sector, hindering collaboration and real systemic improvements. Service workers and practitioners feel disempowered, which can lead them to lean on professional distancing as a coping mechanism.

→ **There is not enough support for families before kids reach OOHC**
The burden on the OOHC system is created by an underfunded family support. The cost and rising demand for OOHC is a symptom of a larger problem.

Workshop 1 dialogue outcomes

Why Change is Needed

➡ **There is not enough support for foster carers once a child enters the OOHC system**
The foster care system is underfunded and foster carers are not supported to prioritise relational care.

➡ **The problem doesn't end when children leave care**
The challenges that children in OOHC face will affect them and their families throughout their adult lives. The education, health, criminal justice or social services system are intersecting systems that need to be considered as part of a system wide approach.

➡ **There is a lack of public awareness about the problem, and a lack of empathy towards kids in care**
The broader community lacks awareness and understanding of the challenges, perpetuating stereotypes and contributing to the invisibility of the issue. Traditional media holds power in shaping public narratives, and there's a need to change the narrative to increase empathy and action.

Workshop 1 dialogue outcomes

How Might We Make the Change

→ For the child to be the north star we need to create a system that listens and responds to families, workers, carers and children. Shifting the sector's focus from self-interest and maintaining the status quo to actively advocating for support for children, emphasising the importance of relationships with families and caregivers.

→ Moving from a system marked by instability, frequent changes, and a lack of sustained relationships to one that is relational - offering continuity, stability, and emotional safety for children, empowering them and their communities.

→ Our envisioned changes extend beyond policy reform, aiming to transform institutional systems into child-centered care. Through future-focused, solution-oriented questions, we identify key elements that, if solved will drive the reform agenda.

Key challenges to be addressed

The concepts from workshop 1 are crucial inputs for the design briefs in workshop 2

1 **Empower those on the frontline so that they can create meaningful connections and sustain real relationships**

2 **Help foster carers feel valued and supported so that they are able to focus on supporting the children in their care**

3 **Support families better and earlier to decrease the number of children entering the care system and OOHC**

4 **Decouple supporting families and assessing child safety so that families feel they can freely ask for help**

5 **Refocus regulation and standards so that we support a relational model of care, child-centred outcomes and holistic wellbeing**

6 **Remove the bureaucratic burden on carers so that we can free up more time for relational care**

7 **Move from a system that minimises risk and cost, to a system that maximises positive outcomes for kids, carers and families**

8 **Better support organisations and services already doing the work so that we take the load off OOHC and create a more holistic and connected system**

9 **Reshape the narrative about OOHC so that the public is actively engaged, increasing political pressure and momentum for change**

10 **Better include the voices of those within the care system**